TRIBAL CASINO ORIGINS, THE OCTOPUS, AND INDIAN HEAD NICHOLS

The Shadowy Underworld dubbed The Octopus and How the Nichols Family Used its Power to Build an Empire in the Southern California Desert.

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Foreword

To all my readers, the police authorities, friends and family…

Sometimes these stories I am writing about in this book scare me. People are still alive whose crimes I've detailed or their kids are alive or maybe just someone who is a fan of the criminal mindset; lunatics abound, at times. If there were a single story I've written that scares me the most – this is it. Should anything malevolent befall me or my loved ones after this book is written, I would ask that police start with this story first as a source of the crime.

The Beginning

One man's vision: to create an economic empire that would sustain generations of his family ad infinitum. On the path to achieving his dream, he would assist a small group of Native Americans gain sovereignty and control their own land…under his leadership, of course. The funny thing was he wasn't an Indian.

In 1978, a self-proclaimed expert in applying for government grants swept into the Coachella Valley, promising to help the Indians lift themselves out of poverty. His name was Dr. John Philip Nichols and he brought along an eleven page resume of his capabilities. He professed an expert on "socio-health and economic-development planning" with more than 25 years' experience working for a company called Pro-Plan International, operating in both the United States and South America. He further claimed to have been a union labor organizer, a former manager of a South American Coca-Cola operation, that he was an ordained minister and that he had a Ph.D. He even claimed to have a Master Brewers Certificate. Nichols also came loaded with letters of recommendations from U.S. Senators, doctors, the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, and a Chilean priest.

His employers however did not have the capability to verify his claims. They were poor, dirt poor. They were the Morongo Band of Mission Indians in Cabazon. At the time, the approximately 500 member tribe was living on their own reservation with little or no money beyond the U.S. government subsistence that tribes across the country were being given as retributory hand-outs. Most of the tribe lived in small cinder-block or run down wooden homes. The roads were literally dirt, and the members lacked for everything that most American families considered necessities, let alone an education.

It was a different world in 1978, and the Indians needed a savior. The grandfatherly John Nichols seemed to be exactly what they were looking for, almost as if he was custom-made to deliver unto them a salvation of income generating business and growth and help them out of the century or more of depravity that the American Indian had been living in since the days of Custer.

He was immediately hired and put in charge of the tribe's health insurance fund. For reasons unknown, his employment with the Morongo Indians didn't last long and he was quickly let go. The tribe claimed he hadn't delivered services as promised. However, he did make quite the impression on another man in another tribe.

Joseph Benitez was the leader of the tiny Cabazon Band of Mission Indians in Indio. I know it gets a bit confusing. But trust me: the Morongo Indians live in Cabazon and the Cabazon Indians live in

Indio on 1,700 acres of nearly uninhabitable raw desert, spread over three large parcels of land. It's just this sort of confusion mapped out by the U.S. government as they set up Indian reservations in the 1800s which spawned the cracked foundation leading to generations of crumbling decline in both Indian habitats and lifestyles. They created the perfect environment for a man like Nichols to step into a respected position by a people who were eager to accept any help they could get.

Once John Nichols was hired to help the Cabazon Band in Indio, help he did. At the time, neither the tribe's poorly educated leader, Joseph Benitez, nor did any of the small tribe of 24 Indians have full-disclosure of Nichols shadowy past, eventually uncovered by other reporters. My investigation indicates that more than one of those reporters may have been killed for his research. Within a dozen years of Nichols getting in bed with the tribe there would be a bloody trail of bodies left in his wake but before he was through, Nichols would open the floodgates on a revenue stream unparalleled on reservations nationwide. From the humble beginnings of unpaved roads and broken down trailers, he would rock the foundations of the United States in their highest court and win victories worthy of calling his efforts an empire. But first the groundwork had to be laid. Familial and emotional relationships had to be strengthened, pockets needed to be lined, emotional roads built and authoritative infrastructure inlaid. Almost immediately after Nichols was hired, he and his family became embroiled in the Cabazon Indians tribal affairs and the Indians either didn't care or couldn't get rid of their "savior."

According to SPY magazine, April 1992, John Philip Nichols did not have a minister's degree from the Philathea Theological Seminary which he listed as his Alma Mater. They can neither confirm nor deny his earning one. Nor does Nichols have a Ph.D. in any study and his claims to have been a union organizer failed to mention that he was jailed in Milwaukee for mishandling Teamster funds.

His resume also forgot to mention that he was arrested as a fugitive in Washington, D.C. in 1964. Nichols told Spy magazine that he, "…took the fall for Hoffa and his friends." In Nichols defense, the charges were eventually dismissed. He also denied that he was ever arrested a second time. This is where his shadowy past really starts to slip to the dark side. SPY's researchers discovered that Nichols criminal history was expunged from United States National Crime Information Center records, as if they never even happened. However, if someone goes abroad internationally and checks Interpol records they will find data on his second arrest. This leads to the belief that either Nichols was extremely lucky and clerical errors have covered his path or that he was very well connected and someone did him a

favor.

Back to the tribe: initially, Benitez and other tribal members, including Art Welmas, who was vice-chairman of the tribe, were impressed and Nichols was hired. Since the tribe had no money to speak of, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was convinced to grant $10,000 to Nichols to develop tribal-management skills. The Cabazon's were astounded that Nichols had convinced the BIA to grant the money and they quickly ignored Nichols most recent troubles with the Morongo tribe. Here was a man who could get things done. Nichols negotiated a 10-year contract which allowed him to be a partner in the tribe's proposed financial ventures, earning 50% of the profits from any future enterprises he brought to the reservation. Nichols was confident that he would be able to control this small tribe to do his bidding.

The Indians quickly placed Nichols in a leadership position and deferred all important decisions to him. He could not officially run the tribe, only an Indian of one-quarter verifiable bloodline or more could do that. So, instead, Nichols became its administrator and from this position he was able to control all aspects of tribal life: its money, its legalities, and its land. According to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, Indian reservations were sovereign nations and could enact their own laws and run their own territories outside of United States laws. However, until Nichols was hired by the Cabazon Band of Indians no one had tested the concept of Indian sovereignty to the extent that Nichols could foresee. In a way, he was a visionary and tribes all across the nation would benefit from his foresight.

The grandiose secret, and some would say devious, plans of Nichols needed funding in order to be implemented. His goal was to build an empire and if not directly challenge U.S. authority, he definitely didn't want to have to adhere to its binding agreements unless it suited his purposes.

The first steps Nichols took to build his economic and political empire were simple, yet they clearly showed the path he was choosing. He decided to sell tax-free cigarettes via mail order from a second-hand trailer on the reservation based on the legal reasoning that the Indians were not subject to taxes by the State or Federal governments. Untaxed cartons of cigarettes were sold for as little $8 and the business was an instant success. He had about 10 employees and they would all sit in the un-air conditioned trailer stuffing envelopes with cigarettes, working shifts that lasted all day – the Indians couldn't have been more thrilled. For the first time in their life money was rolling into their tribe.

Nichols paid tribal members about $100 a week. The

enterprise was generating about $10,000 a week in gross sales, according to Nichols eldest son, John Paul Nichols, who left a job in Florida and come work for his father in 1979.

Two years later, they started selling untaxed alcohol too. But, the state of California sued the tribe for unpaid taxes and won. Somehow though, the state never received a check and the tribe was never pursued by collectors.

As John Nichols became more comfortable in his position as Tribal Administrator, he would talk to his new friends and brag about his connections. He claimed to have friends in high places and to have worked for the CIA and even been involved in an assassination attempts on Fidel Castro of Cuba and on Salvador Allende of Chile. Later, researchers and reporters would uncover connections of Nichols that would also implicate him in drug running and arms supplying to Nicaraguan rebels. However, if pressed hard on any subject about which he did not want to disclose any specific facts, he would defer to calling himself nothing but a social worker doing the good work of helping out a tribe in need.

Not all the tribe members were comfortable with what Nichols was doing. Fred Alvarez, who was a tribal leader and former chairman, became suspicious. He noticed all the non-Indians that John Nichols was bringing onto the reservation and he began to quietly collect evidence of Nichols business dealings.

Wackenhut

From the very beginning, Nichols had tried to get the tribe involved in several deals that a mere social worker would've had little ability to negotiate. To help his endeavors, he proposed joint ventures with the then $600 million a year Wackenhut Corporation, which was based out of Coral Gables, Florida. Wackenhut corp. is a who's who of former espionage experts including CIA, NSA, Secret Service and FBI directors, ex-military personnel, former Joints Chief of Staff, and more. Wackenhut's legal counsel at the time was Edwin Meese III, who coincidentally was Ronald Reagan's Presidential Advisor and would in 1985 become the country's Attorney General. Wackenhut was the sort of company that select politicians and government officials could, and still can, go to and get things done when obtrusive things like laws and ethics prohibit direct official action.

It's very hard to prove anything in regards to what happened or all that happened between the Cabazon's, Nichols and Wackenhut, but, here's a chunk of what has been uncovered.

In 1979, John Philip Nichols and the husband of the Mayor of Indio, Peter Zokosky, created what appears to have been the first joint venture of Wackenhut and the Cabazons. Zokosky was the former President of Armtech, an ammunitions manufacturer, and Nichols sought Zokosky's help in attempting to create what would become known as Cabazon Arms, a weapons manufacturing plant on tribal land that could operate without concern for U.S. law with the ability to supply arms to rebels worldwide, regardless of whether or not Congress had passed a law forbidding such arms sales by a U.S. company. Their first customer was to be the Contra guerillas of Nicaragua.

Nichols and Zokosky even went as far as to bring a Contra leader to the Coachella Valley to participate in a field demonstration of night vision goggles from a lot of 300 they had purchased from a New Jersey company. The test was performed at Lake Cahuilla police firing range on the night of September 10, 1981, along with high-tech guru Michael Riconosciuto and Nichols' ever present bodyguard, Jimmy Hughes, an ex-Army Ranger Vietnam veteran. For two hours, the goggles were demonstrated for three Contras, one of whom was Eden Pastora, known as Commander Zero and another was Raul Arana, one of three rebel leaders within the Contras.

According to SPY magazine, in a letter dated August 1, 1980, the president of Wackenhut's international subsidiary, Robert Kirk, agreed to conduct an exploratory survey of Crown Prince Fahd's palace in Tiaf, Saudi Arabia, with the intention of creating a complete

security system. However, a letter Kirk wrote to Nichols indicates that the Cabazon's were already engaged in soliciting for the private security contract for the Saudi palace and the letter recognized that the Cabazon's supplied the plans for the Tiaf palace. The Saudi government was interested enough in the idea that they conducted a background check on the Cabazons. Mohammed Jameel Hashem, consul of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington D.C. wrote a letter to former South Dakota Senator James Abourezk at his offices in Washington D.C. seeking a referral regarding for the security proposal. Abourezk's response stated, "According to our black list for companies, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians/Cabazon Trading Company and Wackenhut International are not included." The inference the Senator was not writing down was that neither the Indians nor Wackenhut were Jewish owned or managed companies.

When Nichols was asked by SPY's reporters how he could get such a contract with the Saudi's he replied, "I know a lot of people."

Michael Riconosciuto was one of those people Nichols knew. Riconosciuto was supplied to the Cabazon tribe by Wackenhut as a computer programmer in 1980 and was described by Nichols as an "Important asset" to the tribe. Unbeknownst to the Indians, Riconosciuto had a history of drug dealing and other shadowy schemes. He had been arrested in October of 1972 for breaking and entering into the home of his drug suppliers, only a month after being arrested for manufacturing PCP and LSD himself. Both of these drugs require an above average knowledge of chemistry to create. Strangely, records show he was convicted of Grand Larceny the same day as his arrest. He was given a 15-year sentence, but the very next day his sentence was suspended. Most times, when these types of events occur it indicates that a deal has been made with prosecutors for the defendant to turn informant; though one has to wonder if perhaps Riconosciuto might have similar friends as Nichols, who also had his records mysteriously cleared. A decade later, while in a Seattle prison again on drug charges, he would claim involvement in what had become known as "The October Surprise" when it was theorized a conspiracy existed between Iran and Ronal Reagan for the hostages to be held until Reagan was elected president. This allowed the political backlash over Jimmy Carter's inability to free the Americans held in their own embassy and the embarrassment which caused his defeat at reelection.

It was also Former South Dakota Senator James Abourezk, now a high priced and well connected Washington D.C. attorney, who represented the Cabazon Indians in their partnership agreement with Wackenhut Corporation to form a production facility called Cabazon Arms. It became official on April 1, 1981, and was to be located on

the largely uninhabited desert wasteland of the Cabazon reservation in Indio.

Working under the direction of the Special Projects Division of Wackenhut and in conjunction with the Cabazon tribe partnership, Michael Riconosciuto, who was dubbed Director of Research for Wackenhut, and Robert Booth Nichols, representing the tribe became business associates on the reservation in 1981.

I have to take a break here and explain something, because Robert Booth Nichols is still a bit of a mystery to me.

My research thus far – and I may have gone to print without full knowledge of who Robert Booth Nichols is – leaves me unsure about how Robert Booth fits into the Nichols family. Cheri Seymour, in her book The Last Circle: Danny Casolaro's Investigation into the Octopus and the PROMIS Software Scandal claims Robert Booth Nichols is of no relation to John Philip Nichols and that Robert was the son of a prominent Los Angeles doctor. This may be true. However, in later readings, which I now have trouble unearthing from the voluminous sheaf of papers and books I have researched to write this story, I remember a Jim Nichols saying, while attending law school at the time and talking to another reporter, that he had a brother who had been disowned by the Nichol's family due to the bad paths he had decided to travel. I'm now certain I will never know for sure. Perhaps their names are merely a strange coincidence. John Philips Nichols was born in 1925. Robert Booth Nichols was born in 1943. Robert could either be a much younger brother than John or Robert is the son of a very young John, who would have been only 18 at the time of Robert's birth. Still, another reporter stated that Robert Booth Nichols and John Philip Nichols are not related at all. Any scenario is possible, but I cannot verify this fact. If I had to guess, I would suggest that Robert Booth Nichols is the oldest son of John Philip Nichols. I also think that Robert Booth Nichols is the strongest connection the Nichols family had to international crime syndicates and world-wide espionage agencies.

So, Robert Booth Nichols and Michael Riconosciuto teamed up together in 1981 in to help Wackenhut Corporation and John Nichols/ Cabazon Indians create the first military weapons venture on the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians reservation. They operated under the business name of Meridian Arms, a subsidiary of Meridian International Logistics, owned by Robert Booth Nichols. Riconosciuto was the technical assistant for Wackenhut on the proposal because his past drug conviction would not allow him to get the necessary U.S. security clearance to be fully involved in the transaction. However, a letter obtained by reporter Danny Casolaro (who will be discussed later), shows that Patrick Cannan, Director of Relations for Wackenhut

was able to push Riconosciuto's clearance through government channels after a meeting with Wackenhut's Indio Vice-President Robert Frye and Dr. Harry Fair, chief of propulsion technology at the U.S. Army installation in Dover, New Jersey. They had what's called a blackboard exercise on a railgun for the Army and Riconosciuto proved he completely understood the physics of how the gun worked and even made suggestions for the weapons improvement. It was a highly technical and theoretical exercise and Riconosciuto was a very smart man who proved he fully understood not only the theoretical physics of it, but the manufacturing realities of how to produce it and the military applications of the gun. After the meeting, Dr. Fair commented that it would be a shame if Michael Riconosciuto couldn't be used for military/research projects. Dr. Fair even went so far as to call Riconosciuto a "potential national resource." From the descriptions of the projects that Riconosciuto worked on for Wackenhut and John Booth Nichols/Cabazon Indians, it seems that Riconosciuto did get his security clearance. This sort of thing is difficult to prove since it is definitely into the area of "black ops" and "military research."

Riconosciuto brought the first incident of murder to the table when, In January, 1982, Paul Morasca was found hog-tied and fatally strangled by Riconosciuto in his San Francisco apartment. Morasca had been brought in by Riconosciuto to work with John Philip Nichols on the Cabazon Arms transaction and Morasca had access to secret off-shore bank accounts with millions of dollars in them supposedly made from illegal drug sales; money that would now be used to start up a Military-industrial enterprise on the reservation. Three days after Morasca's murder, the aunt of another Riconosciuto workmate was murdered in what at first appeared to be a vicious mugging, but would later be found out to have a connection with Morasca's off-shore money-laundering.

The story gets far more complicated here and we'll delve a little deeper into the details later when we discuss the 1991 murder-suicide of reporter Danny Casolaro and The Octopus Murders. For now, let's witness a worried Riconosciuto making it back onto the Cabazon reservation to disclose his entanglements with the police and the murders and how he sought John Philip Nichols advice on the matter. Nichols listened to Riconosciuto's tale and basically told him not to worry about it. Nichols picked up his phone and told Riconosciuto that he was contacting his Los Angeles Attorney, to whom he gave a quick sketch of the gory details. After Nichols hung up, he told Riconosciuto the problem was fixed and for nearly a decade, Nichols statement held true.

Nichols, Wackenhut, and his tribe's desire for arms

manufacturing knew no end. In 1983, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians was given government clearance to manufacture weapons by the U.S. Department of Defense. Nichols began talks with Stormont Laboratories, a genetic engineering company in Woodlawn, California, about producing a biological weapons detector on the reservation while also promoting the Cabazon's ability to manufacture a 9mm submachine gun at a cost of $75 per gun. He claimed in a letter to Dr. Harry Fair, a leading propulsion technology expert, the weapons, "… meets the needs of a small, poor democracy."

On May 12, 1983, John Philip NIchols wrote a letter to La France Specialties of San Diego, another weapons maker, to discuss a cooperative venture on the reservation. They sought assistance in making and marketing armaments of various types. They all involved new technology not yet on the market, including: a 9mm machine pistol, an assault rifle with laser sighting, a long-distance sniper rifle with a one-mile plus range, a portable rocket system, a night-vision scope and a battlefield communication system that was undetectable by counter-technology of the day. There appeared to be some urgency to Nichols request of La France because he asked for a response in 90-days or less. The most likely answer to Nichols haste is that the Nicaraguan rebellion had heated up to a boiling point and Congress was set to enact the Boland Amendment, which would effectively prohibit all government agencies, the White House, Oliver North, the NSA, CIA and FBI included, from helping the Contras in any way. At the stroke of a pen, this would create a lucrative open market for Wackenhut and Nichols and the Cabazons to take advantage of.

It has been surmised that one reason for Wackenhut to see value in partnering with Nichols tribe of Indians is that, as a minority owned business, they would receive priority consideration for government contracts. Couple that with the new national recognition of Indian rights and the implied non-government intrusion upon tribal lands and there was a ready-made formula for a partnership able to conceal any activity desired. This was a match made in legal heaven. It allowed for a sovereign nation operating within the borders of the United States to do things that the United States itself could not do and yet simultaneously the government could distance itself from any knowledge of the corporation's activities.

From Weapons to Gambling

At the same time Nichols was leading the tribe into weapons manufacturing, the tribe diversified into their first profitable on-site reservation gambling venture: a Bingo Parlor, which they started in 1980 in a converted run down warehouse on the reservation. They expanded, thanks to a $90,000 grant Nichols was able to secure from the Department of Housing and Urban Development under the premises of building a museum of desert Indian history and culture. Instead of a monument to their heritage, the tribe erected a huge white tent and invited the locals in for a chance to turn in their cards for a quick return of cash. The parlor was a huge success, immediately filling night after night to the point of bursting the tent at the seams.

The city of Indio and the County of Riverside however, were not thrilled with the Casino operating in their jurisdictions. Two weeks after the parlor opened it was raided by Indio Police and County Sheriffs. Employees, managers and customers were arrested on the grounds of participating in illegal gambling activity. Evidence and money were seized. Despite the raid, day after day the Indians opened the doors to the Bingo parlor and card room and every day more and more people came to try their luck. The raids continued. The casinos kept reopening after each one. And the people kept coming.

According to an ABC News 20/20 TV story in 1985, bingo was not enough to satisfy Nichols hunger for bigger operations in the early 1980s, nor would it meet the needs of the expanding of his commercial Mecca. He sought the assistance of three mob connected businessmen: Irving "Slick" Shapiro, Rocco Zangari and Tommy Marson of the Gambino crime family. Nichols wanted a card club attached to his Bingo Parlor. Marson was the money man and supposedly gave Nichols $50,000 to assist in starting an actual casino. This would become the genesis of their gambling empire in the Coachella Valley. A 30,000 square foot casino was added soon thereafter.

Prior to his Cabazon involvement, in the early 1970s, Irving Shapiro, a Jewish mobster known never to make a "hit" on Shabbat, Yom Kippur, or similar holy days due to his religious beliefs, started the Alfa Chemical Company. He was been accused of strong-arming Nevada hotels, forcing them to use his products. In 1960, Shapiro opened the Aku-Aku club in the Town House Motel in Toledo, Ohio. In the mid-1960s, Shapiro obtained gambling licenses for Anthony Zerilli and Michael "Big Mike" Polizzi. All the names mentioned in this paragraph have east coast mob connections. Shapiro and his men were believed by authorities to have killed some 500 people over their

lifetimes.

Rocco Zangari was a member of the Los Angeles based Caci family, under mob boss Peter Milano. He started off as a bookie in Palm Springs, where his brothers owned a restaurant and a gift shop.

Shapiro and Zangari ran the day to day operations of the Card Club and Bingo Parlor that, at the time was simply called Cabazon Indian Casino. It would eventually grow to be the Fantasy Springs Resort and Casino.

Zangari's involvement in the Casino operations would be short lived however. He was hired on a contract under the management firm of P.N. Associates, Inc., on September 25, 1980, and was discharged only 3 months later on November 5, 1981. Zangari filed a lawsuit to reclaim the money owed him for the uncompleted contractual amount of his services. Zangari lost the suit on the legal basis of a Federal statute called (United States Code) 25 U.S.C. 81, which basically states that a normal citizen of the United States can't sue an Indian except in very limited instances. However, the case against Zangari did reveal to Nichols and the tribe that they had a flaw in their executive structure. The flaw was that Nichols had placed himself in an ownership position of the Casino and he wasn't an Indian. He had his son, John Paul Nichols, signing contracts for the Indians and his signature left him arguably responsible for unpaid debts by the tribe or at the very least open to possible litigation should the tribe have a lawsuit thrown against them.

Zangari saw the flaw too and on January 28, 1982, appealed the lower court's decision to the United States Bankruptcy Appellate Panels Ninth Circuit Court. On December 25, 1983, the Appellate Court ruled in favor of Zangari on the basis that the tribe cannot claim sovereign immunity against a contract when they have entered into the contract as a partnership whereby some of their partners are non-Indians. The Appeals Court reversed the lower court's ruling, thereby making the Cabazon tribe and Nichols responsible to pay Zangari's, and other plaintiff's debts. Whether or not Zangari or others owed money by the Cabazon/Nichols operations were ever paid is uncertain. One thing that is true is that the Cabazon/Nichols venture could not have this kind of legal exposure if the full potential of the operation was to reach its maturity.

Even before Zangari actually won his case, the Indians and Nichols saw the writing on the walls and to prevent this flaw from becoming more prominent as the enterprise grew, the Casino filed for bankruptcy protection and reformed the partnership into a corporation under ownership of the tribe. Nichols rewrote his management contract and profit sharing plan to benefit the new legal entity and the tribe rubber stamped it. They were, after all, making

more money than any other tribe in the country now with their new gambling enterprises.

What could possibly go wrong?

The Alvarez Murders

Almost every member of the tribe was willing to keep quiet and cash their monthly paychecks, no one else had ever been able to help them acquire. Still, not everyone on the tribe was willing to turn a blind eye.

Former Cabazon Tribal Chairman Fred Alvarez disagreed with current Chairman Joseph Benitez and Tribal Elder Art Welmas granting Nichols extended powers of control over tribal affairs. He suspected Nichols was mismanaging the tribe's money and that most of the profits were going into Nichols own pockets. Something was to be said for this as Alvarez found that his own share seemed to forever be small and Nichols appeared to have an endless pocket of cash from the first day he came to work for the Cabazon Band. Even though Alvarez was afraid of Nichols and rightfully so, he spoke out critically and publicly about the tribe's savior.

In 1980, Fred Alvarez wrote a letter to President Ronald Reagan, detailing the criminal enterprises of John Philip Nichols and seeking help in righting the wrongs being perpetrated on the tribe's reservation. Five copies of the letter were made and placed into Alvarez's personal files concerning what he considered mismanagement of the tribe's affairs.

In June of 1981, Alvarez spoke with the Indio Daily News saying that there were people on his own reservation who wanted to kill him because he saw he elaborate lengths Nichols and his group of immorally driven compatriots were willing to undertake. He spoke to an Indio Daily News newspaper reporter, telling him that Nichols was part of a larger enterprise wanting to "ramrod" Indian gaming through so they could then sponsor casinos across the country on reservations. He confessed that he was scared for his life because there were people working with Nichols who would "kill you," backing him. As Alvarez became more outspoken, the tribal council voted to send him away on trips.

The spark that ignited Alvarez's desire to speak with the Indio Daily News was probably lit in early June, 1981, when he returned from a conference in Denver, Colorado. While in Denver he was approached by a man who offered him a large sum of money if he would carry drugs back with him on the plane to California. Alvarez refused the request but, when he stepped off the plane onto the tarmac, the police were ready and waiting. They grabbed Alvarez and threw him up against a car. Apparently word had not made it back to the desert that Alvarez did not have the drugs on him. Police searched him viciously before letting him go.

Alvarez was sure of Nichols was mishandling the tribes

finances for his own personal gain. He even told his sister, Linda Streeter that the non-Indians running the tribe were skimming gambling profits and that they wanted him dead. At the time, she didn't think he was serious but, Alvarez was sure Nichols wanted him gone. Less than a month later, on July 1, 1981, Alvarez decided to meet with attorney Steve Rios in San Juan Capistrano and the current tribal chairman, Joseph Benitez, to discuss his accusations against Nichols. When Benitez arrived at Alvarez's Rancho Mirage home to pick him up for the meeting, no one came to the door. Upon inspection, Benitez found Alvarez, 32, in a chair in his back yard, shot in the head execution style, along with his girlfriend, Patricia Castro, 44, and his best friend, Ralph Boger, 42. All were similarly shot. The police estimated that the bodies had been dead for about two days. The crime remains unsolved to this day.

Sources claim the police did a poor job of investigated the Alvarez murders. Boxes of evidence, supporting Alvarez's claims that Nichols and Wackenhut were conspiring to skim casino profits and build weapons for the CIA to sell to foreign governments and Contra rebels were removed from Alvarez's home by investigators. But nothing ever came of the evidence. It's been said the detective who landed the case was friendly with Nichols. It is true that the detective took a vacation two days immediately after being assigned the murders, allowing the case to grow cold from the outset. What followed was the most cursory of inquiries and over the next three years the investigation drifted further and further into the department's bottom drawer files.

During the course of the investigation, all of the papers notes; the complete files, which Fred Alvarez supposedly kept at his home as evidence and supporting documents to verify his claims of illegal activities going on at the reservation, disappeared. The police would later say it wasn't at the home when they arrived; though earlier reports indicated different. The Indio Daily News wrote that Indio City Manager Philip Hawes confirmed that Los Angeles attorney William Cole was working on connecting the Alvarez murders to the Cabazon Casino and that the Sheriff's department had confiscated papers from the Alvarez home that he expected to be turned over soon. However, the Sheriff's department claimed no knowledge of such papers. Even the copies of the letter Alvarez had written to Ronald Reagan had disappeared, though; a response from Reagan on White House stationary somehow survived the lost paper trail. Reagan's response stated that Alvarez's claims against Nichols and Wackenhut were "very interesting."

The investigation eventually stalled due to "lack of evidence" and though it remained open, it became a cold case file and wasn't

worked.

Finally, in 1984, Nichols's former bodyguard, Jimmy Hughes, 27, had an epiphany of conscience and informed police that John Philip Nichols and his two sons, John Paul Nichols and Mark Nichols, had given him $25,000 in cash and told him to deliver the bag money to two men in Idyllwild, a mountain town nearly an hour away from Indio, as final payment for the murders of Fred Alvarez and his unfortunate friends.

Peter Zokosky, husband to the mayor of Indio and a business partner of John Philip Nichols, joined Hughes in asking Indio Police to re-open the investigation into the Alvarez murders. The Indio police contacted the FBI and the Department of Justice who came out and asked Hughes to repeat his story. Consequently, he was offered participation in the witness protection program, which he turned down. Instead, he left town on his own. Instinctually, he didn't trust the authorities to be able to hide him from the far reaching tentacles of Nichols connections within the bureau. Hughes was right to be concerned about being held in protective custody away from anyone who knew him. Nichols might have been able to get him. Others would not be so smart about pulling at the threads of Nichols life as they investigated him and his empire. The thought of being whacked while behind bars, or snuffed out while being hidden by a few choice agents in some small town, did not appeal to Hughes. He made a wise choice and hid out on his own, relying on no one else, until a deal was worked out for total immunity in exchange for his testimony.

Hughes testimony was videotaped and filed away. The investigation stalled again and two months later he grew impatient and hosted a private press conference, where he stated, "Nichols admitted to me the ordering of the Alvarez murder. He stated there was a U.S. government covert action." Including, "…pressures from unknown Washington, DC, government agencies which have caused a possible shutdown of the case."

Hughes also openly admitted he was suspicious of authorities and that was why he refused the FBI's offer of witness protection. "Nichols has made a deal with the FBI through the Wackenhut Corporation. Possibly, he himself (Nichols) has been protected by the FBI." He went on to say that Nichols plan had been to manufacture weapons for use in Central America and Alvarez was going to interfere with the plans. Furthermore, he thought Wackenhut and the U.S. governments were jointly involved but, he couldn't speak to this without risking other people's lives. He did talk about a deal Nichols had had made to send arms to Contra leader Raul Arana for use in his planned invasion of Nicaragua. Hughes went on to say Fred Alvarez was "interfering" with covert operations and that the investigation

into his murder was being blocked by “an agency out of Washington.”

According to SPY magazine, the Riverside County District Attorney’s office appeared to pursue Hughes claims. The case was assigned to investigator Patrick Kenneally but surprisingly he was ordered to stop his investigations. He wanted to continue, so he pursued it privately; until a death threat stopped him in his tracks. Decades later he would tell a reporter that two men in suits showed up at his home and menacingly showed him pictures of his children getting off the school bus. Soon thereafter, he quit his job and moved back to the Midwest.

Press reports confirm that at the time of the murders, John Philip Nichols, Peter Zokosky and Wackenhut vice-President Robert Frye were on an exploratory trip to Quebec, Canada, determining if they could jointly purchase Valleyfield Chemicals Products Corporation, a weapons propellant manufacturer, for $18million. The trio then flew to New Jersey, Indian and Washington, D.C. Along the way they’d put together deals to purchase weapons cartridges and 300 pairs of night-vision goggles. According to an exposed Wackenhut memo, the goggles were supposedly for sale to the government of Guatemala, which was legal. Later, in his questioning by the D.A., Zokosky refuted this claim, stating that they were for the Nicaraguans.

Peter Zokosky also explained how Nichols appeared to know that Alvarez was dead, even though Nichols had been out of town at the time. Zokosky claimed that it was he who told Nichols about the murders. Upon hearing the news, Nichols picked up a phone, punched in some numbers and said, “Alvarez is dead.” He paused as someone else spoke on the other end of the line. Then Nichols said, “Okay, so long” and hung up. Zokosky was surprised at how little emotion Nichols showed.

Nothing was ever done by Federal officials about the arms sales and nothing was ever done by County officials about the murders.

In 1992, when SPY magazine was conducting interviews in the decade old case, they asked a Riverside County law enforcement official about the videotape of Hughes testimony and if it the D.A. was planning to pursue the allegations. “I was meaning to get around to that,” was his answer. He never did get around to it and Jimmy Hughes, the former Nichols bodyguard who had been willing to testify, whereabouts were now unknown. The only reference to his location was ‘somewhere in South America.’ Peter Zokosky had moved out of the area too and was rumored to be living somewhere in the Los Angeles area. Neither was contacted.

Attempted Murder

In 1984, John Philip Nichols wife died. He was then 60 years old and he replaced her with a 27 year old heroin addict. Nichols liked the woman but not the drugs; he sought out a local hit man to take care of his problem. It turned out the hit man was an undercover cop and Nichols was recorded on police tapes stating, "I'll pay 500 and 500" – $500 for each murder. He wanted the dealers who were supplying his girlfriend to disappear, forever. Nichols even offered the undercover agent future work in South America, saying, "I do a lot of business down there," and suggested the hit man move to Las Vegas where opportunities for this kind of work came easier, even suggesting he might find himself with a guaranteed long term income.

In January, 1985, John Philip Nichols was arrested for the solicitation for hire of the murder of five people. Indio Police Captain Carl Kennedy told reporters at the time that the investigation stemmed from confidential informant who came to police on their own and agreed to wear a wiretap to capture Nichols request for a contract killer on tape. Captain Kennedy did declare the department was unable to connect the murder for hire of the drug dealers plot with the Alvarez Murders from four years ago.

Strangely, the case never went to trial even though the taped evidence was completely damning to Nichols defense. On February 22, 1985, Riverside County D.A.s, in a deal approved by Judge Noah Jed Jamin, instead allowed John Philip Nichols, 60, to plead no contest to two crimes and he received a four year sentence, plus a $5,000 fine. He then served 18 months and was released. The agreement did end Nichols administration of the Cabazon Indians and for the remainder of his life he only worked as a mental-health counselor for the tribe. California law precludes allowing anyone convicted of a felony to own or operate a casino.

District Attorney Bob Dunn told reporters that during an interview with probation officers, Nichols said he was "assisting law enforcement in stamping out local drug trafficking." Dunn denied there was any truth to Nichols comments.

During his imprisonment, the chief administrative position fell to Nichols eldest son, John Paul Nichols, who was 30 at the time and had been working in management positions for the tribe since 1979. The younger Nichols had an M.B.A. from Claremont College, his tuition paid via a loan by the tribe. Under John Paul's leadership a $150 million deal with the Colmac Corporation was secured to have a power plant erected on the reservation. It took another seven years to complete construction – but, in 1992 the plant began generating

power and is still doing so. Initially, none of the plants 60 jobs were filled by Indians.

California vs. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians

In 1986, the state of California decided to shut down tribal casinos, which had proliferated to multiple reservations in California and the government chose the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians in Indio (and co-defendants the Morongo Band of Mission Indians in Cabazon) to be their battleground case. Since there were multiple incidents in the tribes past where the city of Indio and Riverside County Sheriff's had attempted to shut down the tribe's gambling operations unsuccessfully, the state felt they had ample evidence to support their claim of prohibiting gambling on Indian land.

Since the claimants were a state and federally recognized Indian tribe, the case fell under the jurisdiction of the United States Supreme Court. California and 19 other states would join together as plaintiffs against the tiny tribe from Indio.

The state of California argued they had never approved of the tribes Bingo and card room operations, verified by the fact that police had raided the illegal casinos repeatedly; that these venues violated state laws against gambling and they requested the court recognize their authority in governing reservations within their boundaries and by their subsequent Counties and City ordinances. Furthermore, California presented as evidence that six states; Alaska, California, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon and Wisconsin had been granted criminal jurisdiction over reservation lands by the U.S. Congress in its passage of Public Law 280 in 1953, which shifted legal authority from the Federal government to States in the enforcement of their own criminal justice system in relation to "Indian Country."

The Cabazon Band lawyers argued before the high court that California laws on gambling were more regulatory than criminal and therefore not enforceable on reservation lands since the laws did not expressly prohibit gambling in totality and therefore the state had no authority to try and oppose Indian tribes from establishing their own laws in regards to casinos. They supported their case by offering evidence of existing legal non-Indian card rooms throughout the state and the fact that the state of California sponsored its own lottery.

On February 25, 1987, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Indian's in what would become known as the "Cabazon Decision, going beyond the simple ruling of whether the tribes could establish a casino; but addressing "Indian Sovereignty" and granting a destiny of self-determination to tribal governments throughout the United States. The ruling made a lasting impact upon the tribes and the United States of America. Indian tribes could now legally say they were their own country. Sovereignty was addressed and established in the ruling.

The work of the Tribes and their casino managers was not done though. While the High Court had ruled in their favor, States still had wiggle room to attempt some legislating of their gambling operations, such as: the types of games and the amount of taxation.

Congress was finally very quick to act. In 1988, the California legislature passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) which detailed which types of games the Indians could offer on their reservations and also established the first solid framework for regulating the fast growing Indian Gaming industry. It seemed that even with the legalization of their casinos, the government saw the Supreme Court ruling as justification for intervening more on their lands. Indian casinos would grow at an alarming rate; from a dozen in the country in 1988 to almost 300 ten years later. On a Federal government level, the National Indian Gaming Commission was formed within the Department of the Interior, with its chairman appointed by the President, for the purpose of enforcing the goals of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, including: promoting tribal economic development, creating self-sufficient and strong tribal governments, maintaining the integrity of the Indian gaming industry and ensuring that the tribes are the main beneficiaries of their gaming activities.

Instead of the Supreme Court ruling giving the Nichols family and the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians greater freedom in their tribal activities and Casino operations, it instead had established a clear gateway for government intrusion into their economic revenue streams.

It was time for the Nichols family to double down.

Nichols to More Nichols

In 1990, John Paul Nichols was succeeded by his younger brother Mark Nichols as the chief administrator of the tribe. Funny thing though, SPY magazine claims that Mark Nichols has a 1978 drug conviction from Florida for the sale and possession of LSD for which he served a 6-month sentence in jail. Perhaps it's not a felony charge or perhaps state authorities simply didn't care. Mark is a step-Indian of sorts too. In 1985, he married Cabazon tribe member Virginia Welmas who is apparently not related to the earlier mentioned Art Welmas. Strange for people with the same uncommon last names in such a small tribe to not be related but, that is how the story goes. In 1988, Mark Nichols had proven his leadership prowess by helping the tribe open a pari-mutual off-track betting parlor attached to their existing card club. He also saved the tribe money by getting a $400,000 grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to pay for the 30,000 square foot remodel to accommodate the card room and of-track-betting center. The tribe now had a full-fledged official casino and business was good.

Although the money flowed, not all tribe members believed they were getting a fair shake from the Nichols family. Some still believe that money was skimmed and there was mismanagement of tribal funds.

There was a challenge to the Nichols's authority over the tribe in June of 1991 when former leader Art Welmas and tribal member, Linda Streeter, sister of deceased leader Fred Alvarez, openly attempted to attend a tribal meeting to oppose the continued leadership of Mark Nichols and his family. Nichols marriage to Virginia had helped anchor his relationship with the Cabazon's and to further cement his position. In addition, his daughter, Alexis Nichols, had been elected Treasurer of the tribe.

To get rid of Nichols they were going to have to get rid of current Tribal President John James. Only weeks before, Art Welmas and Linda Streeter had tried to vote out James in a Tribal Council session and failed by one vote. Now, instead of being allowed to enter the Cabazon Bingo Palace where the Council meeting was being held, as was their right, armed guards obstructed their path, preventing them from entering and inside the tribal members accused them of damaging the "dignity and integrity" of the Cabazon's by speaking about private tribal business to the press, – a serious "no no." They were also accused of taking actions that were to "the detriment of the band" by holding a meeting of a majority of its 19 member council win their earlier attempt to oust James.

The Tribal Council accused Welmas and Streeter of stealing tribal food: Fried Zucchini. Most of the meeting, which was more of a hearing, was used to read aloud into the minutes news articles to prove that the intentions of Welmas and Streeter was to get rid of not only James but of the Nichols'. Welmas and Streeter countered with the argument that James was only their stooge and that the Nichols family wanted to get all Indians out of the tribe so they could run the reservation as their own private enterprise.

Mark Nichols chaired the hearing against the rebellion and it was effectively crushed. Welmas was expelled from the tribe for ten years; Streeter for 10. Each was fined $50,000. Streeter went into hiding, moving outside of California and Welmas returned to his home threatening to shoot anyone who came to his house trying to evict him. He publicly defied the Nichols and his fellow tribe members, saying, "This is my land. This is Indian land."

In defending his commitment to bettering the tribe, Mark Nichols spoke with SPY magazine in 1992 and made it evident that every tribe member received $35,000 as an annual salary that year. What he didn't mention, and the magazine's reporter found out was that the payment was a onetime installment due to the sale of a chunk of reservation land to the state of California. Up until that time, the official profit sharing to the tribal members had only grown to $150 apiece a year.

Danny Casolaro and The Octopus

On August 10, 1991, a freelance journalist named Danny Casolaro was found dead by a maid in a Sheraton hotel room in Martinsburg, West Virginia. Casolaro's wrists were slashed and the bath water he lay in was tinged red from his own blood. The authorities filed it as a suicide. However, many theorists claim his death was the direct result of his conversations with Robert Booth Nichols about details involving the Inslaw Computer Scandal, which then segued into the Cabazon Indian tribes' casino, Michael Riconosciuto and the Wackenhut connections.

Casolaro's investigation seemed to branch out to such a wide net, connected to so many other conspiracies: The October Surprise, the Iran-Contra scandal, drug trafficking, pirated espionage software, money laundering by the Bank of Commerce and Credit International, and more. The conspiracy was so vast, so far-reaching and involved so many high level government officials and their legions of secret organizations, agencies and syndicates that Danny Casolaro dubbed the working title of his research "The Octopus."

Danny was born June 16, 1947 to a prominent McLean, Virginia, obstetrician. His parents were wealthy but, they had their own share of grief. Danny was one of six siblings and one child was born with a heart defect and died quickly after birth and an older sister died from a drug overdose when Danny was still a child. In his early twenties, Danny dropped out of college, went exploring for Incan treasure in South American and came back home to fall in love with a married woman who eventually divorced her husband and married Danny. They had a son together.

Thirteen years later they would divorce. In the interim, Danny became a stringer for the National Enquirer tabloid magazine and then a reporter for a new technology magazine called Computer Age. He had lots of friends, was well liked and had the habitual characteristics of many young men in the 1970s: he smoked too much though he was physically fit, drank sometimes to excess, and was considered good looking. He was popular with the ladies after his divorce and was known to have a handful of women who he slept with on a regular basis. Some would call him "Peter Pannish" saying he was like a boy who wouldn't grow up. His boyish charms ended though when he was at work, where he was quite obsessive. He worked his leads at Computer Age with ferocity and was the magazines number one reporter during the 1980s, a very exciting time for computer development.

In 1989, Danny took a second mortgage on his home and

bought Computer Age. Then, in 1990, he got a lead on a story that would become his life's work and ultimately lead to his early death. It was a lead on the decade old Inslaw computer lawsuit Nancy and William Hamilton filed against the Federal government over their claims that an executive level conspiracy within the U.S. Justice department conspired to steal their software program PROMIS, which was originally created to keep track of complex legal investigations and high-security clearance national & international espionage operations. PROMIS stands for Prosecuting Management Information Software.

During the course of the Hamilton's lawsuit, in March, 1991, Michael Riconosciuto, now 44, sent the Hamilton's an affidavit saying he had installed a "back door" to the PROMIS software allowing the United States to access other countries versions of the software and in effect electronically eavesdrop upon their NATO partners who had purchase and installed the software as the latest in computer operations management technology. Specifically: Canada, England and Middle Eastern countries were being watched, although any country, and there were many, who utilized the software and were in danger of pre-programmed hacking access by the U.S. government.

Here is a copy of the affidavit.

I Michael J. Risonosciuto, being duly sworn, do hereby state as follows:

(1) During the early 1980's, I served as Director of Research and Development for a joint venture between the Wackenhut Corporation of coral Gables, Florida, and the Cabazon Band of Indians of Indio, California. The joint venture was located on the Cabazon reservation.

(2) The Wackenhut-Cabazon joint venture sought to develop and/or manufacture certain materials that are used in military and national security operations, including night vision goggles, machine guns, fuel-air explosives, and biological and chemical warfare weapons.

(3) The Cabazon Band of Indians are a sovereign nation. The sovereign immunity that is accorded the Cabazons as a consequence of this fact made it feasible to pursue on the reservation the development and/or manufacture of material whose development or manufacture would be subject stringent controls off the reservation. As a minority group, the Cabazon Indians also provided the Wackenhut Corporation with an enhanced ability to obtain federal contracts through the 8A Set Aside Program, and in connection with Government owned contractor-operated (GOCO) facilities.

(4) The Wackenhut-Cabazon joint venture was intended to

serve the needs of a number of foreign government and forces, including forces and governments in Central America and the Middle East. He Contras in Nicaragua represented one of the most important priorities for the joint venture.

(5) The Wackenhut-Cabazon joint venture maintained close liaison with certain elements of the United States Government, including representatives of the intelligence, military and law enforcement agencies.

(6) Among the frequent visitors to the Wackenhut-Cabazon joint venture were Peter Videnieks of the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., and a close associate of Videnieks by the name of Earl W. Brian. Brian is a private businessman who lives in Maryland and who has maintained close ties to the U.S. intelligence community for many years.

(7) In connection with my work for Wackenhut, I engaged in some software development and modification work in 1983 and 1984 on the proprietary PROMIS computer software product. The copy of PROMIS on which I worked came to the U.S. Justice Department of Justice. Earl W. Brian made it available to me through Wackenhut after acquiring it from Peter Videnieks, who was then a Department of Justice contracting official with responsibility for the PROMIS software. I performed the modification to PROMIS in Indio, California; Silver Spring, Maryland; and Miami, Florida.

(8) The purpose of the PROMIS software modification that I made in 1983 and 1984 was to support a plan for the implementation of PRMOIS in law enforcement and intelligence agencies worldwide. Earl W. Brian was spearheading the plan for this worldwide use of the PROMIS computer software.

(9) Some of the modifications that I made were specifically designed to facilitate the implementation of PROMIS within two agencies of the Government of Canada; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS). Earl W. Brian would check with me from time to time to make certain that the work would be completed in time to satisfy the schedule for the RCMP and CSIS implementations of PROMIS.

(10) The proprietary version of PRMOIS, as modeled by me, was, in fact, implemented in both the RCMP and the CSIS in Canada. It was my understanding that Earl W. Brian had sold this version of PROMIS to the Government of Canada.

(11) In February 1991, I had a telephone conversation with Peter Videnieks, then still employed by the U.S. Department

of Justice. Videnieks attempted during this telephone conversation to persuade me not to cooperate with an independent investigation of the government's piracy of Inslaw's proprietary PROMIS software being conducted by the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives.

(12) Videnieks stated that I would be rewarded for a decision not to cooperate with the House Judiciary Committee investigation. Videnieks forecasted an immediate and favorable resolution of a protracted child custody dispute being prosecuted against my wife by her former husband, if I were to decide not to cooperate with the House Judiciary Committee investigation.

(13) Videnieks also outlines specific punishments that I could expect to receive from the U.S. Department of Justice if I cooperate with the House Judiciary Committee's investigation.

(14) One punishment that Videnieks outlines was the future inclusion of my father and me in a criminal prosecution of certain business associates of mine in Orange County, California, in connection with the operation of a savings and loan institution in Orange County. By way of underscoring his power to influence such decisions at the U.S. Department of Justice, Videnieks informed me of the indictment of these business associates prior to the time what that indictment was unsealed and made public.

(15) Another punishment that Videnieks threatened against me if I cooperate with the House Judiciary Committee is prosecution by the U.S. Department of Justice for perjury. Videnieks warned me that credible witnesses would come forward to contradict any damaging claims that I made in testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, and that the U.S. Department of Justice would subsequently prosecute me for perjury for my testimony before the House Judiciary Committee.

One week after Michael Riconosciuto delivered the affidavit to the Hamilton's he was arrested for solicitation and manufacturing methamphetamines and confined to a federal prison in Tacoma, Washington. While in prison, Riconosciuto originally tried to turn states evidence and join the Witness Protection Program, using his knowledge of Wackenhut and illegal drug and weapons trades in the 1980s as a bargaining chip. Federal prosecutors weren't interested.

With his trial headed towards an inevitable conviction and no help forthcoming from the Justice Department or other government

agencies, Michael Risconsosciuto sought advice and help from the only sympathetic ear to his cause, Bill Hamilton, the original owner of the PROMIS software. Hamilton put Riconosciuto in touch with reporter Danny Casolaro and Riconosciuto finally found a friendly ear willing to help the framed drug dealer and technical expert go public with his cries of concern. Riconosciuto was ready to go public with all his knowledge about Robert Booth Nichols acting as a U.S. operative involved in illegal drugs for weapons pipelines and the U.S.'s covert management of the entire affair via the NSA, CIA and FBI through Wackenhut. The Octopus reached as high as the Reagan and Bush presidencies and their tentacles reached all over the world, even connecting Colombian cartels with the drug riddled streets of many of the United States biggest cities; and, for his part, Casolaro was eager to add another tentacle to The Octopus.

As the Hamilton's Inslaw/PROMIS lawsuit was proceeding through its own highway of road blocks via lawyer's offices and private judge's chambers, Michael Riconosciuto found himself embroiled in a Tacoma, Washington, trial that was not going well for him and would ultimately lead to a lengthy prison sentence.

Despite his extensive evidence submissions and testimonials by himself and other key witnesses, the prosecution had an equally substantial arsenal of evidence and witnesses to contradict him. Michael's claim boiled down to this: He was being set up as a drug trafficker by the very people who were actually doing the drug trafficking on a much larger scale. As proof of the conspiracy, prior to his arrest, he had personally been responsible for gold transfers, money laundering, "virtual dead drops," altered Automated Clearing House daily financial reconciliations, and other transactions for various nefarious men, including Robert Booth Nichols, and others involved in National Security.

Riconosciuto continued to ask for insertion to the Witness Protection Program, which was repeatedly denied or simply not responded to. He also sought help from the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FINCEN), a division of the U.S. Treasury, to substantiate his claims of Wackenhut's and corrupt Justice Department officials involvement in money laundering and drugs for arms sales stemming from a Northern California group he referred to as The Company.

Again, despite substantial evidence that his claims were valid and verifiable, no help was forthcoming. Riconosciuto was even able to pinpoint a $50,000 cash payment Robert Booth Nichols made to Mike Abbell, who was a former U.S. government prosecution attorney, now handling the defense of Colombian Cali drug Cartel leaders Gilbert and Miguel Rodriguez and Jose Londono, who at the time

controlled 80% of the international cocaine trade. The money was to be used to influence court officials, witnesses and/or jury members, by either bribes or terrorism, to decide in favor of the defense.

Up until now, Danny Casolaro had been using Robert Booth Nichols as a second source to verify many of Risconsciuto's claims. Often times he would call Nichols immediately after talking to Riconosciuto in jail or call Riconosciuto directly after talking to Nichols. Over time, Danny came to rely heavily on Nichols, eventually trusting him while his faith in Riconosciuto eroded. Phone calls to Nichols stepped up and Danny and Nichols often found themselves in deep cross-country conversations that would go on for hours in the wee times of 11pm to 2pm.

It was on August 5, 1991, five days before Danny's death, when the paths of Casolaro and Riconosciuto converged on Colombia drug kingpin attorney Mike Abbell and intelligence operative/ weapons entrepreneur Robert Booth Nichols. A virtual hornets' nest of trouble was about to swarm out of its secret hidey-hole.

Riconosciuto, in his efforts to cough up some testimony worthy of plea bargaining away his inevitable trial conviction, was revealing to Danny that Abbell had used illegal techniques, like bribing witnesses and conspiring with investigators and judges and other foul methods to get the drug kingpins safely out of the country. Danny, being a good reporter started checking facts with people who could verify them. He called Robert Booth Nichols and challenged him about his connections with Mike Abbell and the Colombian Cartel. Nichols was furious and told Danny he should end this investigation or he might "end up dead." Casolaro also called a Texas oilman billionaire, Bob Bickel, and others. Danny felt he was nearing the head of The Octopus and he could foresee more than a year's worth of work coming to its final fruition. He was determined to go to Martinsburg, West Virginia, so he could get close to the source. Casolaro called ahead, bought a plane ticket, and set up appointments with the people he most wanted to see. He brought along a large penda flex of information containing detailed notes about the various arms of The Octopus he had uncovered so far. He typed for two days on his manuscript for the book wherein he would reveal all the secrets he had unearthed. On August 7, 1991, he left for West Virginia.

In the final three days before his death, while in Martinsburg, Danny Casolaro supposedly met with several tentacles of his Octopus: Bill Turner, a whistle-blower from Hughes aircraft; two FBI agents who were to give interviews and evidentiary documents relating to the Iran-Contra scandal and Ronald Reagan's October Surprise (a meeting which they later denied ever occurred); and a retired police officer who would reveal another tentacle concerning Laotian drug

lord Kuhn Sa's proposed Golden Triangle.

In those final days, Casolaro also spoke over the phone with FBI agent Thomas Gates as a confirmation source on many of the arms of The Octopus and to Robert Booth Nichols who was willing to cooperate with information regarding drug sales, money laundering and weapons distributions throughout the world.

Nichols was livid at Danny for wanting to investigate in the direction of Mike Abbell and the Colombians. Nichols would later claim to both the police and to reporters that from August 5th on, the day he first learned Danny was researching the Cali Cartel, he'd tried to warn Casolaro off that investigation.

Nichols, Riconosciuto and other friends also knew that after West Virginia, Danny Casolaro would still have one tentacle of The Octopus to work on. That tentacle would be completing his investigations into the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians in Indio, Wackenhut and the Nichols family.

Danny Casolaro never got to make that trip out to the desert to research the final tentacle of the Octopus. On August 10, 1991, he was found dead in his Martinsburg, West Virginia Sheraton hotel room by a maid.

When the police arrived at the hotel, minutes after getting the 911 call, they found Danny in a bath tub full of pink water, tinged with his own blood, his wrists slashed deeply numerous times. The investigation would quickly be dubbed a suicide. The body was rushed over to the mortuary, before a coroner's exam even occurred and the body was embalmed, virtually ruining any solid conclusions which could be obtained from forensics. Only after he was embalmed would his family be notified of Danny's death.

Danny's family and friend cried foul right from the start. There was no way, in their minds, that he would've committed suicide. Danny had even recently paid his homeowners insurance. Would a guy do that right before he killed himself? Numerous discrepancies in the investigation, or lack thereof provided a clue that Danny Casolaro was murdered. What happened to his Penda flex full of notes and the manuscript for his book? Both were gone from his room, never to be seen again. The police would hear none of it and closed the case.

There is so much information about Danny Casolaro and The Octopus that it could easily fill a book and indeed, it has. Numerous books have been written on the subject. My favorite one was called The last Circle: Danny Casolaro's Investigation into The Octopus and the PROMIS Software Scandal by Cheri Seymour. Take the time to Google Danny Casolaro and The Octopus and you will lose days in reading one of the most riveting stories I unearthed in writing this book. Thankfully, shortly before his life ended, Danny Casolaro

uploaded a very complete record of his notes and manuscript to a Boston University group discussion room website under the title The Octopus.

Campaign Contributions

Throughout the 1990s the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians became one of the country's biggest contributors to political campaigns. Just about every politician from the local dogcatcher to the U.S. Presidential candidates had their hand out and the tribe was donating money like they were printing their own; which they basically were – in the form of casino chips.

The tribe had grown to be a substantial force since the early days of selling tax-free cigarettes and firewater to the white man. They'd successfully battled the local police, the County Sheriffs, even the State Attorney General against the Supreme Court. Now, they needed backing for continued success and to deepen their hold on the entities that could turn against them at any time. The Indians realized they had to become reliable economic political partners with the very civic leaders who at one time couldn't lift a finger to help them. It was the same motivations and actions which had created American enterprises like the railroads or the modern day military-industrial complex, only now it was to be the civic minded Indians complex.

Perception was the key to guiding influence. Photo opportunities were available. Stand alongside the community, state and national leaders in a handshake pose, broad smiles gleaming and the mention of a check or a donation or a contribution to a worthy cause. Fire trucks were bought and donated to cities. Computers were provided for schools and Hospital equipment. All sorts of charity stemmed from the ever growing casinos. The marketing approach worked and most desert residents saw the Indians as good neighbors. Critics grumbled that it would be nice if everyone could be selective in what their taxes paid for but critics were few and their grumbles were hushed under the thunderous applause of acceptance.

Civic leaders lined up for the chance to be included in the photo opportunities of special gifts to the benefit of their respective constituents, organizations and districts. Behind the scenes, less publicized, an envelope handshake would pass from Tribal leaders to the politicos who always needed to be re-elected in exchange for support, if the tribe should ever need it.

But, getting involved in politics can, at times, get messy.

The United States Supreme Court may have considered Indian sovereignty a weighty issue in 1987 but, seven years later on June 21, 1994, they decided that sovereignty did not extend to the Indians being able to implement video-slot machines at their new and improved casino facilities without first getting permission from the state.

The justices were not willing to hear an appeal from eight joint plaintiffs of tribes, three from California – including the Cabazon's – in which they claimed they should not have to negotiate a compact with their respective states. The word "Compact" became the new word for "Contract" or "Treaty," which no state wanted to enter into with an Indian tribe again; lest they have to modify or break it in the future. Many of the Indians had already installed the machines, some as many 1,000 machines in their casinos, without adherence to state laws which expressly forbid such gambling. Card rooms and bingo were OK; but, full blown Las Vegas style slot machines were another thing entirely.

To segue briefly, let me say, during this time in the desert history, I was sleeping in the back of my bookstore in downtown Palm Springs, going through a divorce not of my choosing and not wanting to make a decision which might force me further down a path I wanted to go. My store was a half block away from the tented Bingo and Card room Casino of another tribe: The Agua Caliente Indians. Late one night or very early on a still darkened morning, I was woken by the air brakes of several 18-wheeled delivery trucks. This was strange because most deliveries were done between 6 and 8 in the morning when dock workers and hotel staff were on shift. I thought nothing about it and went back to sleep. Once the sun was up, the local news was rampant with stories about hundreds of video-slot machines being now available at the Spa Casino across the street from me. Apparently, as told to me by a friendly News Director at a local radio station, the Indians had brought in the machines on produce trucks to hide them from the state.

There are ways to get around the law. On the reservation, authorities had little legal muscle to raid the now legal casinos but, had they been able to stop the slot machines in-transit, on California soil, it would have been a different matter entirely. The machines made it safely to the hotel casino in the luxuriant company of heads of lettuce, juicy tomatoes and radishes – relish the thought.

Slot machines installed, the tribes welcomed the new infusion to tribal profits. Something about pulling the handle of the machines is addictive for the gambler and the longer people will sit there drinking the free alcohol, able to smoke freely in an ever-growing smoke free world and occasionally seeing the lights sparkle in front of them to declare another random ticketed payout, the more the Indians made. However, the Supreme Court was saying that the tribe had to negotiate a compact, which meant paying some type of taxes and limiting what sort of growth the tribes could anticipate.

Even though the Supreme Court would not listen to their appeal, the tribes still had a case pending in the 9th District Court of

Appeals where they pinned their hopes. The tribes were arguing that the video-slots were not unlike the states own lottery machines. Indian slots paid out in tickets that were redeemed at cashier windows. Their casinos were eerily quiet, unlike Las Vegas where coins fall into a silver metal tray beneath the slot machines. It was this standard that created the similarity to California Lottery machines.

Both the Supreme Court and the Appeals Courts ruled in favor of state regulation via a compact with the tribes. The tribes complained bitterly that the rulings could cost them hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue. No sympathy was to be publicly found. Behind closed doors though, negotiations began.

In 1994, newspapers began running articles on Indian tribes contributing heavily to Democratic candidates coffers. Republicans, like California Governor Pete Wilson, were not so willing to accept the tribe's money. However, at the state level; Gubernatorial candidate Kathleen Brown, Attorney General Candidate Tim Umberg, and many other from state Assemblymen to County Supervisors, to City Council candidates were all willing to accept check or other denominations to forward their cause to get elected. Money poured out from many tribes throughout the state and the Cabazon's were not shy in their in their generosity. Mark Nichols was repeatedly shown to be alongside a known politico as they professed their accolades and support for each other's Mutual Beneficiary Societies. Often the reasons given publicly for the politicians to be seen with Nichols and tribe members was the candidates support for Indian sovereignty and to prevent another broken treaty. The tribes were not shy in stating that they were doing what was necessary to foster the elections of leaders who were supportive of their cause. By October of 1994, more than $500,000 had floated from Indian casino tables to candidates and shortly after Nichols met with Brown he publicly pledged to personally raise another $1.1million for Brown and another $550,000 for Umberg.

The tribes were particularly displeased with Governor Wilson's refusal to negotiate on a satisfactory timeline to legalize the machines. Wilson publicly despised the devices and had a persistent strategy to delay compact negotiations as long as possible, leaving the fate of the tribes and the machines in a constant state of limbo; all the while pursuing legal channels to end the placement of the slot machines.

In November, 1994, Californians re-elected Pete Wilson. Both Kathleen Brown and Tom Umberg were defeated in their respective bids for political office.

In other legal-political affairs, the Cabazon Band was not so generous. A neighboring tribe of theirs that had not been so fortuitous in the new gambling era, the Torrezs-Martinez tribe of the Salton Sea

vicinity, wanted Federal permission to vacate their claim to many thousands of acres that had literally gone underwater back at the beginning of the twentieth century when a Colorado River calamity had created a waterway spill forming the Salton Sea over the top of their reservation. The Torres-Martinez tribe sought legislative relief from the United States Congress that would permit them the opportunity to buy land in Indian Wells and Rancho Mirage and then construct a casino on it. Even Lee Iacocca, an Indian Wells homeowner, was willing to partner with the tribe.

But, the Cabazon Band saw this effort as infringing on their market place and in a way that could be devastating to their own financial interests. So, the Cabazon Band used their newfound connections to squash the deal. Congress did not pass favorable bills that would allow the Torres-Martine tribe the ability to lift themselves from the poverty that the Cabazon's had so recently experienced. The Cabazon's convinced Democratic Senator Diane Feinstein to pull her support for the measure and it died in committee.

In the Cabazon's defense, Mark Nichols wrote a letter to the Editor of the Los Angeles Times stating his disagreement with the Times reporting on the issue and claiming that the Torres-Martinez tribe had been offered three different "options of compromise" to address their needs. According to Nichols all were rejected by the Torres-Martinez tribe. The Torres-Martinez now owns a casino close to the Salton Sea, far from a large and lucrative population and in no way comparable to the Fantasy Springs Resort and Casino, and in no way competitive.

Legal and political tension was mounting in the state as the tribes continued to keep the slot machines in their casinos, claiming that they were on Indian sovereign land. Some Californian's thought that while the Indians had elevated themselves, they had simultaneously reduced the rest of the population to second class citizens, since only a tribal member could own a casino within the state. In the spring of 1997, the U.S. Attorney General declared that due to the lack of a compact between the state of California and some Indian tribe's, soon Federal Marshal's, which is the only government agency with exclusive authority over the reservations, were going to have to raid and confiscate the slot machines and other illegal gambling devices from reservation casinos. By this time, many tribes in California had signed a compact allowing for a small measure of taxing casino profits in return for a limited amount of slot machines and other controversial types of gambling. Under California law, any gambling where the bet is made against the house was illegal, including blackjack. It's classified as Class 3 gambling. Nine tribes throughout the state had still refused to sign the compact which

would severely limit this type of gambling. Five of them were in the Coachella Valley: The Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, The Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, The Cahuilla Band of Mission Indians, and the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, and The Twentynine Palms Band of Mission Indians.

Richard Milanovich, tribal chairman for the Agua Caliente Band in Palm Springs, told the L.A. Times that two-thirds of their profits come from class 3 gambling and that they use the money to provide health insurance and educational scholarships for tribal members.

U.S. Attorney Nora Manella responded that the fact that a criminal enterprise is profitable is no defense. If it were, then drug dealing would be legalized. She said that there were 12,000 illegal slot machines in the state of California and it was her job to enforce the law. No exact timeframe was given for her ultimatum to remove the machines and she said the Marshal's would act according to the law when the government was ready.

Some citizen's cried out in the Indians defense and a rally of some 3,000 individuals, mostly casino employees and Indians, gathered in downtown Los Angeles, vowing to fight the government crack-down. The protesters stood on the steps of the Federal Courthouse and shouted at the building that they would defy all orders and that the Indians were once again being sold a trail of broken dreams and promises. Tribal spokespeople said that more than 15,000 jobs were created statewide by tribal casinos which infused some $450million into state tax coffers and employee wages.

It was a largely peaceful demonstration. No arrests were mentioned in the papers and at the end of the day the protesters went to a picnic in a nearby park. To continue their campaign for slot machines, blackjack and Indian sovereignty, California tribes went on a media blitz, utilizing television, radio, newspaper and billboard advertisements to promote their cause. Action movie star Steven Segal was hired to be their TV spokesman.

On Thursday, June 18, 1998, a Federal Grand Jury indicted Cabazon CEO Mark Nichols, along with Public Affairs Director Greg Cervantes, for laundering of hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegal campaign contributions. U.S. Attorney Nora Manella said there was no proof that any of the candidates, nor their staffs, who accepted the money were aware that the money was illegal. The candidates would get off Scott-Free.

Nichols would not be so lucky and claimed that the indictments were politically motivated and perhaps he was right. None the less, he was served. The indictment said that Nichols had recruited employees, sometimes coercing them, to make $1000

contributions (California's legal per person contribution limit) to candidates of Nichols choosing. Nichols would give the employee the $1000 either from his own pocket or from casino bank accounts, the employee would make the necessary legal disclosures and the money would go to the candidate. Nichols and Cervantes claimed that the money evidenced as flowing from the casino to its employees were bonuses that just happened to match the exact amounts which the employees had given candidates.

Nichols was charged with seven counts of using conduit donors to funnel thousands of dollars in illegal donations. Cervantes was charged with two accounts of laundering money and making false statements to the Federal Elections Commission.

In November, 1998, the Indians won another huge victory in the legal arena when multi-tribe sponsored statewide initiative, Proposition 5, was approved by 62.4% of California voters. The initiative had been opposed and financially backed by many Las Vegas casino corporations and this us vs. them dictum helped fueled Californians response at the ballot box. The proposition, among other thing, forced the Governor to sign a compact with the tribe, permitted gambling devices and lotteries. It finally legalized slot machines and allowed for trust funds to benefit nongaming tribes.

The Indians could now have full blown Las Vegas style gambling within California's borders.

Another victory was handed out too when the charges of money laundering against Mark Nichols and Greg Cervantes were dismissed by a federal judge. On December 16, 1998, U.S. District Judge Audrey B. Collins handed out a 16-page opinion which declared that Nichols and Cervantes were "versed in the minutiae" of election law regulations as proof that they were knowledgeable of whether or not they were committing a crime. But, she went on to say that the law was ambiguous as to what a contributor was and that doubts in the law were to be "resolved in favor of the defendants."

Nichols and Cervantes were delighted with the ruling even though it still left them culpable for one felony conspiracy count each and two misdemeanor counts of making contributions in another person's name.

The U.S. Attorney's vowed to appeal and on February 9, 1999 Mark Nichols high hopes of complete dismissal of the charges were dashed against the rocky shore of mainland legal views when another federal judge refused to dismiss the last remaining charges. This cleared the path for prosecutors in the remaining charges against Nichols and Cervantes in their attempts to defraud the Federal Elections Commission. U.S. Attorneys said they may still seek a reversal of the earlier dismissal and Nichols and Cervantes attorneys

claimed they might seek an appeal against the recent court ruling.

In September 1999, Mark Nichols gave California Governor Gray Davis the highest honor known to any Indian tribe and an honor that is rarely given to anyone except a real Indian. Nichols gave Davis an Eagle feather in a ceremony befitting orchestrated to celebrate the conclusion of negotiations on the compact detailing the states involvement with tribal casinos. This was in addition to the $113,000 donation made by Nichols and the Cabazons to Davis' election campaign,

Unfortunately, there was one hiccup in the event. The California Department of Fish and Game determined that it was illegal for a person to own the feather of an Eagle, which is an endangered species. The fine for the possession of a single Eagle feather is a fine of $1000 and is punishable by up to 6 months in jail.

To mollify the issue, the Cabazon's stated that they did not "give" the feather to Davis. Rather, it was entrusted to him. For his part, Davis found an exception to the law saying he would safe keep the feather utilizing a California law that allows for the state to own endangered species in much the same manner as the state owns zoos. The feather remained on display in the Governor's office as a symbol of his treaty with the Indians.

For all his political wrangling, Mark Nichols now had a target on his back and was to be hung out to dry. On Thursday, October 14, 1999, Nichols and Greg Cervantes found no alternative except to plead guilty to the money laundering charges federal prosecutors were pursuing against them. Specifically, they admitted to funneling $41,000 to the Bill Clinton-Al Gore presidential campaign fund. Federal law limited the contributions to $2,000 per person, at the time. Under the plea agreement reached with prosecutors, Nichols would pay a fine of $200,000 to the court and $56,000 to the Federal Elections Commission and serve three years' probation. Cervantes would pay a fine of $13,000 and be on probation for a year. Their sentence would be officially served after the New Year.

When Nichols and Cervantes finally appeared before U.S. District Judge Audrey B. Collins for sentencing on February 28, 2000, the judge ordered Mark Nichols to quit associating with campaign fundraisers for 5 years. Prosecutors tried to sway the judge into imposing a 3 month prison sentence on Nichols. But, the judge denied the request. Instead, she ordered Nichols to 30 days of home arrest and increased his probation to 5 years, adding that he must not "associate directly or indirectly or indirectly with political fundraisers," including, but not limited to, benefits, fundraising dinners, or other events to collect money for political purposes. In essence, Nichols political career was over. However, his CEO career

for the Cabazon Indians was not yet finished. The tribe gave Nichols an interest free loan to pay off his fines. He would continue on as the chief administrator of the tribe – for a while.

In March of 2000, Proposition 1A, also known as the Gambling on Tribal Lands Amendment, was passed by 64.5% of California voters. The statewide ballot initiative, funded largely by contributions of Indian tribes and their casinos modified section 19, Article IV, of the California constitution further reinforcing Tribal Rights to conduct all types of casino gambling on Indian reservations while simultaneously limiting state rights to regulate them.

Much of the success from the effort to get this initiative passed can be laid at the feet of Mark Nichols and the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians. Nichols may have been under investigation for falsely filing campaign contributions; he and the tribe may have pushed the envelope on Indian casino operations – some may say they broke the laws to get the machines running. Certainly they orchestrated many other nefarious schemes and plots that we don't even know about, because we only know what was written about and presented in court and anyone who knows anything knows that you never catch the criminals for every one of their backhanded deeds. You only catch them at the one they did a little too openly. For all their underhanded and law breaking ways, the Nichols family, from their father through every one of his sons, created the empire John Philip Nichols had begun some 20 years earlier. The day Proposition 1A passed; there was a lot less need to operate from the shadows.

But Nichols was still obligated to fulfill the terms of his plea bargained conviction and during his probation, on July 30, 2002, Mark Nichols and the Cabazon tribe members met with the New York Gubernatorial Candidate Andrew Cuomo at the Fantasy Springs Casino to donate $25,000 to Cuomo's campaign as payback for Cuomo's helping the tribe when Cuomo was Bill Clinton's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. During his tenure as Secretary, Cuomo had been instrumental in assisting the tribe to obtain a designation as an "empowerment zone." This granted them access to federal financial benefits – grants and tax breaks – for the improvement of impoverished tribal lands. At the time, the tribe was making millions and millions of dollars annually from their casino. Though Cuomo's opponent and countless commentators asked him to return the tainted money, I found no record that he did.

In 2003, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians gave $75,000 to Governor Gray Davis's re-election campaign against Arnold Schwarzenegger. Davis lost the election.

Embezzlement

Apparently, not all government officials can be bought and in 2001 the Nichols family had a bad year.

On March 17, 2001 the family patriarch, John Phil Nichols, had a seizure resulting in a heart attack. He died the same day. His obituary in the Los Angeles Times both praised and scandalized him, saying, he had launched the Cabazon Band of Mission Indian into business ventures of card rooms and bingo parlors, the sale of tax-free cigarettes and discount liquor and that under his leadership the tribe had benefitted from improved health care and educational opportunities. The Times highlighted Nichols as the leader of the legal fight when the Cabazon's and the Morongo Tribes teamed up to win a victory for Indian tribes throughout the nation in the Supreme Court. The resulting landmark decision guaranteed Indian sovereignty and created the opportunity for Indian gaming. The Times also vilified Nichols for his conviction in the 1984 murder-for-hire plot and noted his two years in prison. John Philip Nichols was 76 at the time of his death.

Meanwhile, back at the reservation, the youngest of the Nichols brothers, 46 year old Robert Moses Nichols had a good job. He'd been promoted from working as the card room manager in 1996 at the Fantasy Resort and Casino to his new position as Director of Gaming Operations in 1999. Less than a month after climbing to a new rung on the ladder of corporate success he was fired after being caught with his hand in the cookie jar. Someone in the tribe must have had concerns about the Nichols's and their money managing ability. Two generations of Nichols had built the tribe from poverty to some of the wealthiest Native American people in the country. But, the Nichols family had left a trail behind them and someone must've had enough; because on November 30, 2001, Robert got a Thanksgiving surprise when he was indicted by a Federal Grand Jury out of Los Angeles on charges of embezzlement.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Elliot Krieger said Robert may have stolen more than $500,000 from the tribe's casino from 1996 to 1999 though they could only prove $17,200 was gone. Robert was indicted on nine counts of embezzlement and one count of theft. Authorities felt they had proof Robert was going to the card room cashier windows at the casino and cashing false "paid-out slips." Robert claimed he needed the money as reimbursement for tournaments and other promotions that either never really happened or had already been paid. A Federal Court would soon issue a summons for Robert, then living in Yucca Valley, to surrender himself to authorities.

On December 20, 2001, Robert pleaded innocent to the charges. In the interim, he also was under investigation for bilking $23,500 from Las Vegas casinos.

In April of 2002, Robert Moses Nichols changed his plea to guilty on five counts of embezzlement and theft in a plea bargain with the U.S. Attorney's office. His crimes carried with them the possibility of up to 25 years in prison and a $1.25million fine which would be determined at a July 22nd sentencing hearing. He would also be prohibited from working in or for a California or Nevada casino ever again.

According to the Wall Street Journal, Robert Nichols was sentenced to one year in prison and forced to repay the money he stole from the tribe. Like his father John Philip Nichols, Robert could never work in a casino again.

Mark Nichols Ousted

When it rains, it pours, even in the arid landscape of desert casinos.

In May of 2005, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians voted unanimously to fire Mark Nichols as CEO, Duff Wrenz as Chief Operating Officer and Greg Cervantes as Public Affairs Director, for mismanaging of tribal funds. Nichols was not fired over the IRS audit of a $145million tax-exempt building bond, which was to be utilized for essential public services and instead was questionably purposed to finance the construction of the current 250 room Fantasy Springs Hotel and its adjoining 97,000 square foot Convention Center. That tolerant attitude changed when the tribe found itself in a financial quandary and had to disband their police force and fire departments, including possibly having to auction off their squad cars, fire trucks and other public safety gear to maintain fiscally responsible. The tribe had had enough. Too many irregularities were found in the budget review and the blame was laid plainly at Nichols feet. Even the tribe's Treasurer, his now ex-wife, Virginia Welmas-Nichols, voted to oust him.

Nichols executive leadership position was his downfall, as he was opposed to reorganizing in the face of declining casino profits when the country slipped into the early stages of the looming national economic depression. The ramifications of the impending IRS audit and the competition from other tribes expanding casino operations in the desert were becoming serious issues. To top this off, Nichols formerly friendly Cabazon Tribal Council friends (now totaling 35 members of the tribe) didn't see eye-to-eye with him on his opposition to reorganizing.

Mark Nichols and the other two executives supporting his policies were escorted out of the casino and shown the way off reservation immediately by tribal and casino security, ending nearly 30 years of the Nichols family leadership over the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians.

Cutting the public safety departments saved the tribe $5.5million annually. The damage done by Nichols relentless desire to expand his lucrative empire at the expense of the Indians was detrimental to the tribe's budget, but not significant enough to warrant bankruptcy. Tribal second vice-chairman Marc Benitez said it would take about a year to restore full stability and budget security. Some large scale projects would be put on hold temporarily as the tribe restructured but, he felt assured that the profits from the casino would eventually restore the tribe to its pre-existing budgetary levels and beyond.

A Google search about Mark Nichols life after his being ousted from the Cabazon tribe revealed he had 13 followers and 132,028 views on his Google Plus page. It also showed he wrote the following quote in a January 26, 2013 blog posting, his only blog posting:

"The only suggestion that I offer is watch for any angst developed by forcing the process. Remain relaxed and settle into it. You're not going anywhere as part of you is already there. Let thoughts pass as you feel for that completely relaxed feeling, relax into it further and just let thoughts float by and keep relaxing deeper. As you integrate all of our masks fall away as the stream of thoughts dissipate and evaporate leaving you integrated in your pre-adulterated center. Remember you are already there; it's not a matter of going somewhere. Effort can become an obstacle. May you and all that is, know they are one. Namaste."

On his Google Plus page, Mark Nichols showed his place of residence to be Pau Pau, Moorea, Tahiti. On his Facebook page, Mark Nichols showed his residence to be Mount Shasta, California, and he claims to be living the life of a painter and poet. His page also showed a lot of photographs of himself in his glory days as CEO for the Cabazon tribe when he ran their casino and other operations, standing alongside such notables as Al Gore, State Assemblyman Cruz Bustamante and California Senator Barbara Boxer, among others.

Robert Booth Nichols

There is one character in the Nichols saga whose tale is best told on its own. His tale is such a mystery that I felt it best to give him his own chapter.

Born, March 6, 1943, Robert Booth Nichols led a life of normalcy. He dropped out of high school and worked as a salesman for a security alarm company. The location of his childhood is unknown. Much about him is unknown. What is known is that he became involved with what he thought was the CIA; recruited when he was 22 or 23 years old and thereafter lived mainly in the shadows of the real world; popping up into verifiable existence from time to time. On a few of those occasions when he did surface, Robert Booth Nichols claimed to be involved in, or to have knowledge of, nearly every national and international conspiracy of the day; from the Bay of Pigs to the Iran-Contra Scandal and beyond. As the 1980s slipped into the 1990s, Nichols' life seemed to take on an even nastier turn in the darker shades of his nether-world and continued up until his death, or disappearance – another uncertainty. The full truth may never be known about this man.

To tell his tale, I have to ask the readers forgiveness for digressing into this sub-chapter. Much of Nichols life has nothing to do with Palm Springs or the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians. The part of his life that was spent out here in the desert is so significant that I cannot feel I have done the story of Indian Casinos and sovereignty justice without completing this one biography.

In Cheri Seymour's book The Last Circle: Danny Casolaro's Investigation into the Octopus and the PRMIS Software Scandal, Seymour says plainly that Robert Booth Nichols was not related to John Philip Nichols. Yet, in another document (which I have now laid aside and cannot easily reference because the foot-high mounds of research I have accumulated) I know I came across a paragraph which stated that a Jim Nichols, who was attending law school in the 1970s, told another reporter that he had a brother who had gone down a very dark path and had been disowned by the family. Either way, I can no longer verify Robert Booth Nichols family tree. Perhaps that is what he intended when he gave up a traditional hard-working life and became a spook long long ago.

He described his first three jobs in a deposition taken in 2008:

"The first one was when I first met them, was to speak to a woman who stayed at the Surfrider Hotel and find out why she was in Honolulu and who she was seeing and have cocktails with her. If

possible…"

"A Chinese woman that was in Honolulu that stayed at the Princess Kalani Hotel and to see who she was seeing and what she was doing…"

"A trip to Australia to see who was speaking, to the best of my recollection, and negative – when I say negative, to see who they felt were being anti-American interest in an area that was formally an R and R location, Sydney, for U.S. forces."

One very specific rule that his handlers told Robert he had to obey was that he was never ever pay taxes again in his life. Something most Americans wish they could get away with doing. He was also promised complete immunity from federal law for anything he might do in the future. This worried Nichols in the beginning. He was receiving a paycheck from what appeared to be a regular U.S. company at the time. Throughout his life, the company that paid him might change but, it was always a front for what he was really doing. He questioned his handlers on this. They told him again and again that he was supposed to never file a tax return again in his lifetime. He was also told never ever to publicly reveal the projects he worked on. They would all be covert operations in the United States national security interests.

Over his life, he was involved in many secret operations. Here's a list of a few I have found reference to:

Nichols claimed that Sam Giancana was his business partner and that Nichols mentor was the head of the Yakuza in Hawaii.

He ran drugs to and from a Singapore drug lord in exchange for weapons.

He helped create the drugs for weapons pipeline that started as the October Surprise, aimed at keeping the U.S. embassy hostages in Tehran, Iran, thereby depriving Jimmy carter the chance of appearing a capable President and allowing Ronal Reagan to win the Presidential election in 1980. After Reagan's victory, these same channels flowed into a new conspiracy which became the Iran-Contra Scandal.

He helped facilitate a covert business venture called The Company whereby a group of agents, local police officials and judges, grew marijuana and made methamphetamine on Federal land and on an Indian reservation. This occurred in and around Marin County for the purposes of distribution and sale in Los Angeles, and eventually other major cities in the United States as a way to generate cash to fund other covert operations.

He was involved in the Lockerbie Pan Am Flight 103 plane bombing over Scotland in 1988.

He created a drugs-for-weapons exchange with warlords in Lebanon, under the guise of rebuilding the country, as part of a CIA

covert operation in the 1980s.

He claimed involvement with the Mai Hua and Tong crime families of China.

He sold the PROMIS Software to Iran and other Middle Eastern countries to help the U.S. spy agencies keep an eye on these countries.

He was supposedly a long time co-criminal aligned with the Gambino crime family and a personal friend of John Gotti.

He was involved in the Music Corporation of America's mob connections and was investigated by the FBI for corrupt ties to Hollywood.

He believed that his actions over his lifetime were entirely legal and that his orders were given from the highest authorities within the government: the office of the President, especially during the Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush administrations.

As early as 1978, the FBI kept a file and ongoing investigation on Robert Booth Nichols for his involvement in narcotics trafficking, money laundering and other criminal activities...

This is just the tip of the iceberg.

It seems that the concept of drugs for guns was a cash business which became a staple in much of Nichols life. He was a good looking man by most people's accounts, standing over six feet tall with a resemblance to Clark Gable and he had an athletic build, although he started to gain weight around the middle as he matured.

Robert Booth Nichols legal business activities included:

He is credited with the invention of an automatic machine-gun pistol that packed more power than the commonly popular MAC-10.

He owned a company called Meridian International Logistics, which also owned Meridian Arms. He was an advisor to Wackenhut Corporation during his time at the Cabazon reservation in Indio and simultaneously sat on the board of FIDCO, First Intercontinental Development Corporation, which, among other things, made and sold the Bradley personnel transports to the U.S. military. It was while serving in these capacities that he sought to facilitate weapons manufacturing for John Philip Nichols and the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians.

In 1992, he started a company in Hawaii called Pacific Rim Services; and that same year, he was an official advisor to the movie "Under Siege" starring Steven Segal and Tommy Lee Jones and played a role as a ranking officer aboard the ship.

From 1989 to the early 1990s, Robert Booth Nichols became embroiled in two lawsuits. One whereby he sued an FBI agent named Thomas Gates for slander in the amount of $11million for causing him a loss in business in Australia. The other lawsuit was against the City of Las Angeles whereby he claimed financial loss stemming from the

revocation of his concealed weapons permit affecting his ability to procure military weapons contracts. He lost both lawsuits and thereafter began expanding his fraudulent financial schemes.

In 2004, he orchestrated a scheme to defraud that would be his eventual downfall.

On December 16, 2008, while trying to resolve accusations against him for high financial crimes, Robert Booth Nichols gave a deposition of his lifetime activities to U.S. Attorney Jeff Alberts in New York, in front of three witnessing FBI agents. Two months later he would be dead.

The scam began, as it usually does, by finding a mark. In this case, the fall would be attributed to Sam Israel, a Wall Street trader who mismanaged a hedge fund called Bayou Group, LLC that was more than $100million out of balance. Israel was desperately searching for an investment that would right his books and return his fund to profitability and respectability. Besides being incredibly in debt to his own investors, Israel had been kicked out of his house, his wife had left him, and he had a cocaine and alcohol habit.

It was spring 2004 and Israel heard of a man who knew of a top secret computer program that kept track of where and when the Federal Government injected money into the market and a man who knew of secret investments only meant for the mega-wealthy. Robert Booth Nichols told Israel he traded in Treasury Notes secured by tons of gold at the U.S. prime bank in Atlanta. The T-Note was worth $250billion and leveraged by liens against it. Only the most influential of banks traded in these. It was a secret and secure market which was generally only invested in by the wealthiest of families: The Rothschilds, the Vanderbilts, and the Rockefellers, and who knows who else. Nichols said, if they used some select bankers he knew in Europe they could get in and out of the T-Note, making millions, maybe hundreds of millions of dollars, in a very short time and none of the principal parties would know about it. The interest alone on the T-Note would be worth millions of dollars even if you only owned it for a day. All Israel had to do was trust him.

So, trust him Israel did.

The two began jet setting around Europe at an alarming pace, meeting bankers at odd hours and having clandestine meeting with unique individuals who had English and Arabian accents. By the third stop, Nichols told Israel the time was ripe and Israel should deposit $150,000,000 into Barclay's Bank of London. Israel did what Nichols asked. Then, Nichols told Israel they'd missed their opportunity by mere minutes and they began jet setting again. At one point, during the wee hours of the darkened morning, Israel was so frustrated with Nichols that he stormed out the back door of their hotel and saw a

man wearing a turban staring at him. The man spoke to him in English, saying something about the investment. When Israel questioned him, the man claimed to not speak English. In his frustration, Israel fought with the man, and then pulled out a gun, which Nichols had given him to carry, and shot the Arab. The turban exploded in a spray of blood and brains. Nichols came outside and told Israel they had to get away before the police showed up. When they were safe in another hotel less than an hour later, Nichols made a call and said he'd taken care of the body. No news of the murder ever made it to the media. During the later trial and lawsuits that would emerge from the fraud, Israel would say he finally determined the murder to be an elaborately staged ruse. Nichols would deny it even happened.

Israel took his money out of Barclay's and put it into another bank in Germany. Nichols was depressed. He borrowed $10million off Israel and promised to pay it back when the investment worked out. As collateral, Nichols offered Israel a bond worth $100 million from a safe deposit box he had in Mayfair, England. Israel and Nichols went to the bank together to get the bond. At the bank, Nichols passed a retinal scan and they were led to the vault where Nichols pulled a very old looking money box from his safety deposit box. He told Israel that if the box wasn't opened at exactly the right angle, it would explode. Nichols carefully opened the box and then set it down. From inside it, he tossed Israel a tape and told him it was the Zapruder film, the real one, which showed who really killed John F. Kennedy.

It never did.

Nichols and Israel jet-setted around Europe some more, always chasing the elusive clandestine meeting with a banker who could get them access to the secret market. After spending more than a million dollars on hotel, air and train travel, Israel realized he would never get the investment and his $10 million loan to Nichols was lost too. His money had been frozen in the German bank after it mysteriously disappeared from his account for a few hours and then returned.

Israel went home dejected. The Securities and Exchange Commission audited the books on Bayou Group, LLC, and Israel found himself under investigation and then a defendant in a criminal lawsuit for embezzlement from his investors. He filed his own lawsuit against Robert Booth Nichols ho claimed that the entire investment was legal and he had no idea that Israel was a fraud. The case dragged on for a few years with Nichols plying all sorts of legal wrangling to stall and negotiate a settlement or a plea bargain.

On December 16, 2008, as part of a settlement Nichols gave his deposition to U.S. Attorney Jeff Alberts. In it Robert Booth Nichols detailed his life story, many of the covert operations he'd performed

under the handling of men whom he presumed were CIA agents (although now he wasn't so sure they'd ever really worked for the country he loved) and the Prime Bank fraud he pulled on Israel. He'd negotiated a financial settlement with Israel which he would, of course, never pay.

On Valentine's Day, February 14, 2009, Robert Booth Nichols was in Geneva, Switzerland, with a New York stockbroker friend, Mark Stolz, who found Nichols dead after he missed a meeting. Nichols appeared to have had a heart attack, although the coroner also noted a substantial blow to the head was more likely the cause of death. Stolz cremated the body the same day and then notified the U.S. Embassy in Bern, who in turn notified Nichols next of kin.

Many believe Robert Booth Nichols is still alive today, leading a new life, with a new identity. Some think that perhaps his handlers killed him for publicly stating too much about his past and the operations they secretly worked.

Sam Israel was found guilty of securities fraud and then tried to fake his own death in a bridge jumping suicide. When his girlfriend was about to be thrown in jail for aiding and abetting the escape of a felon, Israel turned himself in to face a 22 year prison sentence.

Alvarez Murders Revisited

In August of 2009, Riverside County Investigators decide to reopen the investigation into the murder of Fred Alvarez, Patricia Castro and Ralph Boger. Later, sources would confirm that the investigation was opened up at the urging of Boger's daughter Rachel Begley. Only, this time, the state's Attorney General would head the investigation since then Riverside County District Attorney, at that time, Rod Pacheco was a distant cousin, to the man who would be charged for the murders of Alvarez and friends: former informant Jimmy Hughes.

According to the Indian media source, NativeTimes.com, Rachel Begley had secretly captured Jimmy Hughes on videotape in 2008 saying that the murder of her father was a "mafia (style) hit job" that was "a lot bigger than the murder of this guy or that guy." This new evidence and more would reopen the case.

As the new theory went, Hughes, (now 52) was no longer considered the $25,000 bag man for the 1981 killings. Instead he was being charged with committing the act of murder himself; and conspiring with John Philip Nichols, Nichols' son John Paul Nichols, and others. He was being charged with three counts of murder and one count of conspiracy to commit a crime

A Special Governor's warrant was issued for Hughes arrest. He was now the leader of the Jimmy Hughes Ministry which, according to its website, claimed that since 1995 the church provided services to battered women, drug addicts and others, in Central America. The ministries headquarters was in Miami, Florida. Hughes was arrested at the Miami-Dade International airport on September 26 as he was about to depart on a plane headed for Honduras. He would be extradited to face charges in about a month and would be held in Miami until his extradition.

Hughes hired legal counsel and fought the extradition. He was eventually escorted back to Indio to face investigators, who though they tried and tried, were not able to gather enough evidence to prosecute. The only evidence which did come forward exonerated Hughes. But, prosecutors refused to reveal that evidence. California Deputy Attorney General Michael Murphy suddenly and immediately dropped the case and on July 1, 2010, Jimmy Hughes walked free from jail, never to be seen again. Authorities believe he returned to Central or South America to work for a drug cartel.

John Philip Nichols had died eight years earlier in 2001. His son John Paul Nichols was not to be found. Authorities tried to contact him at a New York City address and at an Indio Golf Course home. Their attempts were unanswered. Another man, Glen Heggstad,

was mentioned in the warrant, though not charged. He was interviewed by Riverside County Sheriff's detectives who would not reveal the specifics of their conversations with the informant. Heggstad had been friends with Alvarez, who had told Heggstad that he feared for his life when he uncovered information regarding Nichols illegal activities. This information included mismanagement of tribal money during the early beginnings of the tribe's casino ventures when Nichols was trying to work with the Wackenhut Corporation to build weapons for the Nicaraguan Contra rebels. Linda Streeter, the now grown daughter of Fred Alvarez who had been only 12 at the time of her Dad's murder, told the Associated Press that Alvarez's fears grew from the fact that his mailbox had been shot up and that his motorcycle began having many unexplained breakdowns due to mysteriously missing parts, during the time leading up to his death.

In her book on Danny Casolaro and The Octopus, author Cheri Seymour postulates that the reason Jimmy Hughes was never prosecuted stems from his religious involvement in the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International. The Fellowship membership greatly overlaps the Reagan administration, high level Secret military organizations and Central and South American Politico-Military organizations. Seymour basically states that he had people in higher places watching out for him when he was about to take the fall.

In July, 2011, The Desert Sun ran an article where former Hells Angel sergeant-at-arms Glen Heggstad spoke to a reporter about his involvement with the 30-year-old murders and the recently closed investigation by the state Attorney General's office. Shortly before the article, the police had arrested Heggstad on the grounds that he knew Jimmy Hughes and knew that the murders were about to happen and did nothing to stop them. He was accused but let go due to lack of evidence.

Heggstad said state Attorney General Murphy had lied in the felony complaint which prompted the Governor to issue the warrant and that the statements were made to shut Heggstad up about the crime so the truth couldn't easily come out. It was done as a way to keep the truth out of court.

According to Heggstad, the reason the authorities didn't want him on the stand was he'd make a terrible witness for the state. He had a long record of fighting and disturbing the peace. He'd even served a year in jail when he attempted to bribe a witness to miss a judicial hearing. Furthermore, he claims that in the 1970s and 80s; he conspired with police to retrieve stolen merchandise for people when the police couldn't legally do anything about it. He claimed that at the time, he knew most of the thieves in town and often would get a tip via a phone call from the police and then he'd go and forcibly get

the “goods” back. He would receive a commission based on 50 percent value of the merchandise and then would give the police officers a referral fee, though not all officers accepted the fee. Through his work, he became nicknamed “Crazy Glen” Heggstad and other people, non-police related, began to hire him to handle divorce cases and private investigator work. It was for this kind of work that Jimmy Hughes and Fred Alvarez approached him, Heggstad said.

Heggstad said Fred Alvarez and himself had become friends who shared a mutual love of riding their Harley-Davidson motorcycles. The two would occasionally go riding across the vast desert back road landscapes in the days when it was legal to ride without helmets, sporting only sun glasses as head gear with the wind whipping through their long hair.

It was Alvarez, who broached the subject with Heggstad one day, while Alvarez was sitting on his sofa smoking one joint (marijuana) after another, sharing his fears about non-Indian Nichols getting the Cabazon Band more and more involved in the arms manufacturing business. He was very concerned that a government hit man was going to take him out. Heggstad said it was hard to take Alvarez serious. He was ranting. However, Alvarez had three pieces of damning evidence that he was being followed: his mailbox had been shot up, as a warning he thought; his house had been ransacked; and his motorcycle engine unexplainably fell out onto the road while he was riding it. The engine incident simply could not have happened without someone tampering with it because Alvarez maintained his motorcycle himself and kept it secure in the living room of his Rancho Mirage home.

Heggstad claimed that while Jimmy Hughes was working as Security Chief at the Bingo Parlor and Poker room for the Cabazon’s, Hughes approached “Crazy Glen” looking for work. He remembers it plainly because Hughes still had the crew-cut military hairstyle and wore goofy shoes. Hughes said he was willing to do just about anything necessary: bodyguard, hit man, collector, he didn’t care. But Heggstad didn’t need any help. Also, Heggstad simply didn’t believe that Hughes was willing or able to do everything he claimed and as far as Heggstad was concerned, Hughes was full of crap.

After the Alvarez murders, Heggstad ran into Hughes again and Hughes immediately asked Heggstad if he believed him now? Hughes never actually admitted to the murder but, “Crazy Glen” thought the implication was clear.

Heggstad said that the detectives assigned to the cold-case informed him that multiple informants sad Hughes had made similar statement a half dozen times to other people. But, the Desert Sun could not get authorities to repeat that claim officially. Furthermore,

Heggstad said he still has his doubts about Hughes committing the murders – because what kind of professional goes around whispering tales about his dirty deeds to others?

In his Desert Sun interview, Glen Heggstad shared the same information he told police detective John Powers two years earlier. Heggstad said that when detective Powers called him, he was in Mexico and they arranged to have dinner together to discuss the case. Heggstad was willing to repeat his conversations with both Hughes and Alvarez. Powers told Heggstad that he had someone claiming that Heggstad had been told or hired to "lean" on Fred Alvarez, but that he'd also been told that Glen had not taken the job. Heggstad told Powers that it was the cop who was crazy. Heggstad told the Desert Sun that even over 30 years his memory wasn't that bad. There was no way that he'd gone from beating up drug-crazed thieves to murdering someone. Powers tried diligently to get Heggstad to offer up new evidence, even saying the conversation was "off the record,' though in reality, Heggstad could be called as a witness later.

In another conversation, Heggstad says he told Powers not to call him as a sworn witness out of concern for his reputation being damaged. He didn't like the thought of headlines that might read "Former Hells Angel Turns State's Witness." So, instead, the police named Heggstad as a co-conspirator in the case against Hughes. Heggstad hired his own lawyer and waited for the detectives to come calling with an arrest warrant. Friends and family suggested he take it on the lamb, hop on his motorcycle and run away but, Heggstad didn't want to run. He stayed and the police never came. For nine months he chewed his nails, worrying about a knock on door as prosecutors and investigators tried to develop a case against Jimmy Hughes during 2009 and 2010. Eventually the police gave up and Hughes was released.

When questioned by the Desert Sun, detective Powers couldn't recall the conversation with Glen Heggstad and the cold-case division supervisor, Sergeant Scott Brown wouldn't comment because the case was still open. It is still open today, 34 years after the killings occurred.

Afterword

If this story intrigues you, as it did me, please take the time to Google some of the subjects involved, the people, the conspiracy names, and definitely Danny Casolaro, The Octopus and Robert Booth Nichols. In these nearly fifty pages of writing I barely scratched the surface of this tale. If I had written it in its entirety, it would've become a book in its own right. Other authors who have done so either did an incredible job or were found dead of an apparent suicide. The best book on this subject that I have found is The Last Circle: Danny Casolaro's Investigation into The Octopus and the PRMOIS Software Scandal by Cheri Seymour. Buy it online and read it. Cheri Seymour should have received a Pulitzer for all she uncovered. Nathan Baca, a local reporter from KESQ TV made a series of news reports about the Cabazon Band and the Octopus murders and won an Emmy Award. Despite these efforts, the story is often buried by the mainstream national media. I can only guess that the reasons for the media staying away from the story is that it is well connected to high level government officials and the facts are difficult to verify as they are mired behind veils of secrecy under the guise of national security whether it was legal or not.

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Eric G. Meeks is a second generation rare book dealer, Real Estate agent and a former Barnes & Noble bookseller. He's lived in Palm Springs for the past 35 years and his family has owned several businesses giving him unique access to Palm Springs area celebrities. In 1998, the Palm Springs Police Chief, asked him to serve on an advisory board to the police department, where Eric served its chairman for his final three years, till 2003. Eric still lives in Palm Springs, with his wife Tracey. Six of their eight children are presently living at home with them. One child is attending University and another recently made Eric and Tracey grandparents with the birth of a beautiful baby boy.

When Eric isn't writing or selling real estate, he loves going to consignment stores and thrift stores to peruse the used books. He maintains a library of over a thousand books at home and reads constantly. Some of his favorite current reads are:

11/22/63 by Stephen King
The 6th Extinction by James Rollins
A Chain of Thunder by Jeff Shaara

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